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AUTHOR Summers, Tracy; Blendinger, Jack
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ABSTRACT

The West Point/Mississippi State University Enrichment Project was an intensive 5-week summer intervention for 117 at-risk students. Parents of these students were invited to participate in the parent component, and at the end of the program they were surveyed to determine their perceptions of the program. Whether involving parents had a positive effect on their perceptions was studied. Thirty-six parents completed and returned the questionnaire. Parents agreed that the project had a positive effect on their perceptions of the quality of the schools, and they generally felt that the project increased their respect for and trust in the teachers. Parents appreciated the efforts taken to involve them and enjoyed assisting their children in the at-home activities. Parents also thought their children liked having them participate, and 92 percent felt that they would like to have their children participate again. All of the parents indicated that they would recommend the program to their friends. Seven tables present these findings. (Contains 16 references.) (SLD)

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**INVOLVING HARD-TO-REACH PARENTS OF
ADOLESCENT CHILDREN IN THE SCHOOLING PROCESS**

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Tracy Summers
Jackson Public Schools

Jack Blendinger
Mississippi State University

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Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the
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The West Point/Mississippi State University Enrichment Project was an intensive five-week summer intervention project involving 117 at-risk students. The project was developed for students who had experienced academic failure and behavior problems during the school year. The parents of these students were invited to participate in the parent component of the project. At the end of the various activities in which the parents were involved, they were surveyed to determine their perception of the project.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to determine whether or not involving the parents in their children's education through the project had a positive effect on their perception of schooling. At the conclusion of the project, parents were asked to respond to the following questions:

1. Did the project have a positive effect on your perception of the quality of the West Point schools?
2. Did the project increase your respect and trust toward the teachers who were active in the project?
3. Did you appreciate the efforts taken by the teachers in the project toward communicating with the home?

4. Did you like assisting your child's learning through at-home learning activities and participating in the parent workshop. Do you believe the participation had a positive effect on your child's school work?
5. Did your child feel good about having you actively participate in his/her learning?
6. Would you like to have your child participate in a project like this again next summer?
7. Would you recommend to your friends that they have their 6th, 7th or 8th grade children participate in the project in 1994?

Literature Review

Today's households are headed by two-parent families, single parents, cohabitating parents, gay parents, blended families or families headed by grandparents rearing minor children. Fuller (1993) stated that it is important to consider all these types of family structures when talking about increasing parent involvement in schools. She believes that educators should consider the various types of family structure when they talk about increasing parent involvement in schools.

According to Jackson and Cooper (1993), parent involvement programs in the New York City Public Schools have shown:

1. Parents are concerned and interested, but may have survival problems that must be addressed

first. Self-help support groups seem to meet these needs.

2. Schools need to explain to parents what is needed and how they can support the school's efforts. Leadership groups and emphasis on topics of school-home interaction help develop and expand organized parent groups.
3. Working with parents and families of high school students may require more active strategies, since such families may be less accessible (pp. 30-31).

They list ten factors which seem central to successful urban (and other) school programs to improve school-home collaboration:

1. Leadership--visible, active involvement of principals with explicit support of district administration and personnel in the schools with personal skills in working with groups.
2. Accessibility--open lines of communication between parents and schools with immediate access to principals and staff members who are friendly and helpful.
3. Time--sufficient time to plan, recruit, and follow up with parents by project staff; time to reflect on the work of the groups and make necessary changes in policies and procedures.
4. Cultural awareness--project staff members' identification with parents and an understanding of the culture of the parents and community so trust can develop.
5. Active teacher roles--involvement of teachers so they can see parents in a different light and vice-versa.

6. Continuity--continuous and regular attendance in group meetings so a sense of community and ownership is built.
7. Public recognition of parents and other participants in a visible way.
8. Broad-based support --involvement of outside community groups to assist and help sell the school to the larger community; partnerships must be nurtured.
9. Adolescent focus--all participants attention to the growth and development of adolescents; sharing of views of parents and teachers of the same behavior can inform both sides with new perspectives.
10. Recognition of parents as people--recognition of the needs and interests of parents as people preceding information about the involvement in school programs (p. 31).

Many hard-to-reach parents are preoccupied with personal problems. They are often welfare, live at poverty level, and may be unprepared to meet the demands of society. These parents often have had negative experiences with school during their childhoods and hold resentments that strongly influence the attitudes and values of their children. These parents are also likely to be struggling with other aspects of adult life, leaving them with negative perceptions of self-worth, feelings of alienation from the larger society that the school represents, and insecurity in their relationships with people associated with the school. Before they can

be expected to desire training from the school, they must begin to develop a positive relationship with people associated with the school (Petersen & Warnsby, 1993).

According to Vandergrif & Greene (1993), the degree of involvement falls along the following continuum:

1. At one end are parent who are both supportive and willing to participate. They are likely to attend workshops and conferences, respond to notes and phone calls, and get involved in decision-making roles through advisory committees and planning teams.
2. Some parents simply are not joiners, though they may care deeply about their child's education.
3. Perhaps a rarer parent--and the most difficult type to identify--is the one who pays lip service to education by attending events, but is not supportive at home.
4. Parents who are not supportive and do not participate are the most difficult to reach, but perhaps the most important group on which to focus efforts (pp. 19-20).

They believe parent involvement has two key elements: that parents be supportive with their encouragement and understanding and that parents be active.

Schools, families, and communities all have extensive and diverse needs; fully meeting them requires a comprehensive approach (Hollifield, 1993). He stated that schools need to develop multiple strategies

geared to the needs of the families and communities they serve. Hollifield offers six methods to help schools reach out and form effective family, community and school collaborations.

1. School help for families--schools assisting families in relation to the families' basic obligations.
2. School-home communication--the basic obligation of schools to communicate from school to home about school programs and children's progress.
3. Family help for schools--involvement in school of parent and community volunteers who assist teachers, administrators, and children in classrooms and other school areas.
4. Involvement in learning activities at home--parent-initiated or child-initiated requests for help and particularly, ideas from teachers for parents to monitor or assist their own children at home in learning activities that can be coordinated with the children's classroom instruction.
5. Involvement in governance, decision making, and advocacy--parents and other community residents in advisor, decision-making, or advocacy roles in parent associations, advisory committees and school improvement or school site councils.
6. Collaboration and exchanges with the community--involvement of any of the institutions that share some responsibility for children's development and success (p. 11).

Teachers can improve their partnership with parents by writing letters to parents (Manning & Manning, 1993). Blending and Jones (1992) said that letters and notes

from teachers provide an excellent means for developing and maintaining communication with parents. They further suggest "good news" calls to parents from the teacher (or principal) to recognize the child for something well done which do much to promote positive attitudes and enhance relations.

Palladino (1993) makes ten suggestions for principals to provide direction and leadership for teachers in meeting the needs of students from single-parent homes. His ten suggestions are:

1. Reach out to establish greater school-parent connections.
2. Request and provide information.
3. Publicize and standardize test schedules.
4. Determine and accommodate student learning styles.
5. Help parents structure homework time.
6. Encourage parents to ask for explanations.
7. Provide examples of excellence.
8. Provide or arrange for tutoring.
9. Encourage parents to recognize and reward student success.
10. Assign single-parent students to male teachers (pp. 47-48).

Flaxman and Inger (1992), present 12 ways schools

can use to encourage involvement of parents--especially single and working parents, non-English speaking parents, and poor and minority parents.

1. Increase awareness and sensitivity of school staff to parents' time constraints.
2. Give parents blanket permission to visit the school at all times.
3. Establish or support family learning centers in schools, storefronts, and churches.
4. Make the school facilities available to a variety of community activities.
5. Facilitate teen, single, working, and custodial parent peer support groups.
6. Provide before school child care so working parents can see teachers before going to work.
7. Conduct evening meetings with child care so working parents can attend.
8. Conduct evening awards assemblies to recognize students and parents for their contributions to the school.
9. Establish bilingual hotlines for parents.
10. Send bilingual messages to parents, not only on routine notices, but also on things parents can do at home to help educate their children.
11. Do not make last minute school cancellations.
12. Print all signs in the school in the languages spoken by school families (pp. 3-7).

Flaxman and Inger also suggest schools provide parenting training, family resource and support programs.

According to Cook (1993), many schools are establishing new relationships between schools and parents as parents gain easy access to schools and participate in school governance decisions. The line between interest and intrusion and between inquiring and interfering must be drawn.

According to Schurr (1993), parents and educators are often victims of outdated perceptions that put up barriers to home-school communications. She suggests that administrators might consider seven common elements identified by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory in a study of promising parent involvement programs:

1. A written policy that legitimizes the importance of parent involvement.
2. Administrative support represented by allocation of dollars, space, and people power.
3. Training focused on communication and partnering skills for parents and staff members.
4. Emphasis on partnership philosophy that creates a feeling of mutual ownership in the education of students.
5. A two-way communication structure that occurs regularly and consistently.

6. Networking that facilitates the sharing of information, resources, and technical expertise.
7. Regular evaluation activities that try to modify program components as needed.

Schurr also suggests 16 proven parent involvement strategies:

1. Mutual goal setting, contracting, and evaluating.
2. Assessment of school policies, practices, and rituals.
3. Parent lounge/center/resource room.
4. Public information displays, public service messages, and work-site seminars.
5. Parent handbook of guidelines and tips.
6. Weekend or evening public information fair.
7. Parent and student exchange day.
8. Extra academic credit for parent involvement.
9. An old-fashioned family night at school.
10. Schoolwide communication plan.
11. Parent/teacher dialogue journals for communication.
12. Official parent proclamation efforts.
13. Monthly home-achievement packets.
14. Home visits for a special bond.
15. Schoolwide homework policy.
16. Meet-and-Greet program (pp. 5-8).

Teaching responsibility, encouraging resourcefulness and promoting respect are ways to help one's children do well in school (Rosemond, 1992). Although the ideal parent is a rarity, schools can do much to increase parent involvement by meeting parents where they are (Vandergrift & Greene 1992). According to Manske (1992), parents are the key to a child's learning, not textbooks, teacher or special programs. Having students keep journals in the classroom to take home with them can enhance parent-child-teacher communication (Ramsaur, 1992). Schumm & Radenchich (1992) suggest that presenting clear expectations of both the parents and the children and holding mini-lessons with parents and children are ways to improve parents' involvement in their children's education.

Like the British Morning Programs of the '70s and '80s, an upstate New York program encourages parents and community residents to get involved in children's education. The culture of the school focuses on learning; the climate of the school is wholesome and cooperative. The school becomes a community of learners of all ages (Black, 1993). Characteristics of the New York Morning Program were as follows:

1. A school committee--with help from the entire staff--plans the Morning Program.
2. Parents and community residents have standing invitations to attend Morning Programs.
3. Students play a part in making the Morning Programs work.
4. Teachers, parents, and students are encouraged to share their skills, talents, and interests in Morning Programs.
5. Teachers help parents and community residents plan presentations that involve all students and hold their interest.
6. Morning Programs may be one time lessons or a series of lessons on a topic.
7. Morning Programs usually involve students as active learners.
8. The purpose of the Morning Program is clearly learning, not entertainment (pp. 51-52).

The Mine Hill school district developed a parent involvement program that was selected best in the state by the New Jersey School Boards Association. Part of the assistance includes referring families in need to the Division of Youth and Family Services, Family Enrichment, Head Start, Child Find, day care, and camps for regular and special needs students, along with providing throat-culture service through a school nurse and a fluoride treatment program. The parent involvement program helps parents help themselves, establishing an environment in

which parents and the school system are partners. The program works on two levels. First, it involves parents with the school and teacher to assist their child's education and reinforce it at home. Second, it gets parents involved, not only in their own child's education, but in the school as a whole to provide the best education possible to all students (Palestis, 1993).

In summary, educators need to consider the various types of family structure when they talk about increasing parent involvement in schools. They also need to develop multiple strategies geared to the needs of the families and communities they serve. New relationships between schools and parents need to be established gain easy access to schools and participate in school governance decisions.

Research Procedures and Findings

Parents in the Mississippi State University/West Point project were surveyed and asked to give their opinion of the it using a combination of five-point Likert and two-point dichotomous scales addressing the following:

1. Perception of the quality
2. Respect and trust toward the teachers

3. Communication with the home
4. At-home learning activities and participation in the parent workshop
5. Active participation in his/her learning
6. Should the project repeated next summer
7. Recommendation of the project to friends

The survey instrument also allowed for comments.

The subjects in this study were delimited to the parents of the 117 at-risk students in the West Point/Mississippi State University Enrichment Project.

Thirty-six of 117 parents completed and returned the questionnaire. The data was summarized and statistically treated using the chi-square tests at the .05 level of significance for each of the seven research questions. An analysis of parent responses to each of the seven questions follows.

Question One

1. Did the project have a positive effect on the parents' perception of the quality of the West Point schools?

The findings for question one were statistically significant concerning perception of the quality of the West Point Schools (see Table 1). Twenty-seven parents (75%) strongly agreed and 9 parents (25%) agreed. No parents disagreed. The project had a positive effect on

the perception of the parents toward the quality of the West Point schools.

Table 1

Chi-square Goodness of Fit Test
on Perception of the Quality

Category (Class)	Observed Freq. (O _i)	Expected Freq. (E _i)	$\frac{(O_i - E_i)^2}{E_i}$
Strongly Agree	27.0	7.0	57.14
Agree	9.0	7.0	0.57
Uncertain	0.0	7.0	7.00
Disagree	0.0	7.0	7.00
Strongly Disagree	0.0	7.0	7.00
Total	36.0	35.0	78.71

$$\begin{aligned} \chi^2 &= 78.7143 \\ \text{D. F.} &= 4 \end{aligned}$$

Question Two

2. Did participation in the project increase parents' respect and trust toward the teachers who were active in the project?

The findings for question two were statistically significant in regard to respect and trust toward the teachers (see Table 2). Twenty-three parents (64%)

strongly agreed and ten parents (28%) agreed. Only three parents (8%) were uncertain. No parents disagreed. The project increased parents respect and trust toward the teachers who were active in the project.

Table 2

Chi-square Goodness of Fit Test
on Respect and Trust Toward the Teachers

Category (Class)	Observed Freq. (O _i)	Expected Freq. (E _i)	$\frac{(O_i - E_i)^2}{E_i}$
Strongly Agree	23.0	7.0	36.57
Agree	10.0	7.0	1.29
Uncertain	3.0	7.0	2.29
Disagree	0.0	7.0	7.00
Strongly Disagree	0.0	7.0	7.00
Total	36.0	35.0	54.14

$$\begin{aligned} \chi^2 &= 54.1429 \\ \text{D. F.} &= 4 \end{aligned}$$

Question Three

3. Did parents appreciate the efforts taken by the teachers in the project toward communicating with the home?

The findings for question three were statistically significant regarding teachers communication with the

home (see Table 3). Twenty-nine parents (81%) strongly agreed and five parents (14%) agreed. Only two (5%) were uncertain. Parents appreciated the efforts taken by the teachers in the project toward communicating with the home.

Table 3

Chi-square Goodness of Fit Test
on Communication with the Home

Category (Class)	Observed Freq. (O _i)	Expected Freq. (E _i)	$\frac{(O_i - E_i)^2}{E_i}$
Strongly Agree	29.0	7.0	69.14
Agree	5.0	7.0	0.57
Uncertain	2.0	7.0	3.57
Disagree	0.0	7.0	7.00
Strongly Disagree	0.0	7.0	7.00
Total	36.0	35.0	87.29
χ^2			
= 87.2857			
D. F. = 4			

Question Four

4. Did parents like assisting their children's learning through at-home learning activities, participating in the parent workshops and did they believe the participation has a positive effect on children's school work?

The findings for question four were statistically significant regarding the ratings by parent involvement in at-home learning activities and participation in workshop (see Table 4). Twenty-six parents (78%) strongly agreed and ten parents (22%) agreed. No parents disagreed. Parents liked assisting in at-home learning activities and participating in the parent workshops. Parents were also of the opinion that participation had a positive effect on their child's school work.

Table 4

Chi-square Goodness of Fit Test on At-Home Learning Activities and Participation in the Parent Workshops

Category (Class)	Observed Freq. (O _i)	Expected Freq. (E _i)	$\frac{(O_i - E_i)^2}{E_i}$
Strongly Agree	26.0	7.0	51.57
Agree	10.0	7.0	1.29
Uncertain	0.0	7.0	7.00
Disagree	0.0	7.0	7.00
Strongly Disagree	0.0	7.0	7.00
Total	36.0	35.0	73.86

$$\chi^2 = 73.8571$$

$$D. F. = 4$$

Question Five

5. Did the parents believe their children felt good about having them actively participate in their learning?

The findings for question five were statistically significant regarding parents on active participation in their children's learning had a positive effect (see Table 5). Twenty-six parents (64%) strongly agreed and ten parents (36%) agreed. No parents disagreed. Parents though their children felt good about having them actively participate in the learning process.

Table 5

Chi-square Goodness of Fit Test
On Active Participation in Their Child's Learning

Category (Class)	Observed Freq. (O _i)	Expected Freq. (E _i)	$\frac{(O_i - E_i)^2}{E_i}$
Strongly Agree	26.0	7.0	51.57
Agree	10.0	7.0	1.29
Uncertain	0.0	7.0	7.00
Disagree	0.0	7.0	7.00
Strongly Disagree	0.0	7.0	7.00
Total	36.0	35.0	73.86

$$\begin{array}{rcl} \chi^2 & & \\ \text{D. F.} & = & 4 \end{array}$$

Question Six

6. Would you like to have your child participate in a project like this again next summer?

The findings for question six were statistically significant concerning participation in the project next summer (see Table 6). Thirty-three parents (92%) indicated that they would like to have their child participate in a project like this again next summer. Only three (8%) said they would not.

Table 6

Chi-square Goodness of Fit Test
on Repeating the Project Next Summer

Category (Class)	Observed Freq. (O _i)	Expected Freq. (E _i)	$\frac{(O_i - E_i)^2}{E_i}$
Yes	33.0	18.0	12.5
No	3.0	18.0	12.5
Total	36.0	36.0	25.0

$$\chi^2 = 25.0$$

$$D. F. = 1$$

Question Seven

7. Would you recommend to your friends that they have their 6th, 7th or 8th grade children participate in the project in 1994?

The findings for question seven were statistically significant concerning participation in the project to friends. Thirty-six parents (100%) indicated that they would recommend to their friends that they have their 6th, 7th or 8th grade children participate in the project in 1994. No parents said they would not recommend to their friends that they have their children participate in the project in 1994.

Table 7

Chi-square Goodness of Fit Test
on Recommending the Project to Friends

Category (Class)	Observed Freq. (O _i)	Expected Freq. (E _i)	$\frac{(O_i - E_i)^2}{E_i}$
Yes	36.0	18.0	18.00
No	0.0	18.0	18.00
Total	36.0	36.0	36.00

$$\chi^2 = 36.0$$

$$D. F. = 1$$

Conclusions

Based on the findings from the study, it can be concluded that involvement in the West Point/Mississippi

State University Enrichment Project had a positive effect on parent perceptions their children's schooling process. The project also increased respect and trust toward teachers. The parents appreciated the efforts taken by teachers in communicating with the home. The parents also liked assisting their children through at-home learning activities and participating in workshops. Also, the parents believed their children felt good about having their actively participate in the learning process. Parents want their children to participate the project next summer and would recommend it to their friends who have 6th, 7th and 8th grade children.

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